

Transforming the Armed Forces of Central and East Europe

by Jeffrey Simon

Key Points

The transformation of Central and East European (CEE) armed forces into modern contributors to Euro-Atlantic security during the next decade will be more difficult than in the last, because euphoria over joining the West is dissipating, and attention is turning to problems of reform.

CEE governments have been unable to provide long-term plans and to guarantee resources to build military capabilities. Plans still must be developed, especially in Slovakia and Slovenia, and reliable projections of resources are sorely needed in Romania.

Downsizing and restructuring militaries and integrating general staffs within ministries of defense can create friction in civil-military relations; the United States could help mitigate such problems through retraining aimed at alternate careers and merit-based career development programs.

In moving to all-volunteer forces, CEE partners will lose an instrument for shaping the citizens of young democracies (such as Lithuania) and manpower pools from which to recruit extended-service volunteers (like Germany). NATO allies could provide partner programs focused on conscription to foster civic virtues and help define training for specific military roles and missions.

Confusion prevails over the appropriate length of conscription for each CEE country. However, terms of 6 or 7 months can only prepare reserve forces and are not adequate to meet operational requirements.

As Central and East European (CEE) armed forces are reduced and restructured over the next decade, human and financial resources will be stretched and stressed, in some cases beyond capacity. CEE governments and societies will likely experience civil-military tension. Due to resource shortages, CEE Membership Action Plan (MAP) partners, who aspire to NATO membership, will be tempted to exaggerate defense planning and enlarge forces to accommodate their political objective of Euro-Atlantic integration.

The accompanying chart (see page 3) illustrates trends in CEE defense establishments and budgets discussed below.

New NATO Members

The **Czech Republic** had a defense establishment of 78,580 in January 1999, only 60 percent of its strength in January 1993. The government approved the security strategy of the Czech Republic in February 1999 and the military strategy in March 1999. Defense was allocated 1.9 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) in 1999 and 2.0 percent in 2000. The "Concept for Development of Forces 2003–2008" establishes guidelines for future development, under which the military will be cut roughly 25 percent by 2004. In terms of operational posture, the armed forces are divided into immediate reaction forces, rapid reaction forces, and main defense forces, with readiness times of 10, 20, and 30 days, respectively.

The ratios among officers, warrant officers, and noncommissioned officers (NCOs) will alter significantly. The officer corps will decrease, while warrant officers and NCOs in extended active service will increase. The number of 12-month conscripts will decline to

23,000 in 2000, 21,000 in 2004, and 20,000 in 2009, by which time 85–90 percent of conscripts will provide support services. The Czech Republic can meet its force goals. The main problem it faces is how to develop warrant officers and recruit extended-service NCOs. To date, programs to do this have failed.

Hungary had a defense establishment of 60,000 in January 1999, less than 40 percent of the strength a decade earlier. Hungarian demographics severely limit the number of conscripts available for military service; the cohort of draft-age males declines from 90,000 in 1998 to 50,000 in 2003. This decline is aggravated by a 9-month conscription term, which the government would like to reduce to 6 months.

Though Hungary approved its "Principles of Security and Defense Policy" in December 1998, its defense plans must now be reconsidered, because the government is unwilling to provide adequate resources and cannot meet NATO target goals.

After Hungarian Chief of Staff Ferenc Vegh resigned over these issues, and over integrating the general staff into the defense ministry, his replacement, Fodor Lajos, noted that the forces were short 10 billion forints and must renegotiate commitments to NATO. Prime Minister Viktor Orban added that the government planned to cut the military from 55,000 to roughly 35–40,000. In mid-July, the cabinet passed a so-called secret resolution to streamline the armed forces, which purportedly will ease financing bottlenecks and increase professionalism.

In late July 1999, the government announced that it would not meet its predecessor's commitment to NATO to raise its defense budget to 1.8 percent of GDP. Instead, it would

spend only 1.51 percent in 2000, increasing to 1.61 percent by 2004. (The previous, already modest, plan had proposed 1.8 percent by 2001.) In addition, personnel will decline roughly 10,000 (mostly officers) while NCOs increase to a ratio of 2:1 with officers.

Poland had a defense establishment of 285,000 in January 1999, about 50 percent of the 1988 levels. The government approved the "National Security Strategy" in November 1999 and the new defense doctrine, "Assumptions of State Security Policy," in December and provided 2.1 percent of GDP to defense in 1999 and 2000, down from about 2.4 percent during most of the 1990s.

In April 1998 the defense ministry issued "Order No. 60" reducing the defense establishment to 180,000 by 2003. In May 2000 the government approved a 150,000 variant. Senior officers would decline by 19,000 (or 22,200, if a 160,000 variant were adopted). Social dislocation would be further magnified by changes in the numbers of commissioned officers (declining 50 percent by 2003) and warrant and noncommissioned officers (increasing by 150 percent). The 2003 goal calls for 90,000 cadres consisting of 20 percent commissioned officers, 40 percent warrant officers, and 40 percent NCOs.

The Council of Ministers adopted the "Program for Integrating and Modernizing the Polish Armed Forces for the Years 1998–2012" on 15 October 1998. As military reductions commenced, the retention of officers with appropriate skills became an issue. During 1997, roughly 4,000 officers left the army; during 1998, 7,850 regular members departed, of whom more than half were officers, 400 of whom had completed English courses. Of those who left, roughly 85 percent were resignations and less than 2 percent dismissals. This led Deputy Defense Minister Robert Lipka to complain that "unfortunately, the wrong people are leaving."

While Poland can meet its force goals, it shares with other countries many problems that degrade morale, including social conditions, housing, and pensions. The relatively healthy economy also draws talent away from the professional forces.

MAP Partners

Bulgaria in January 1999 had a defense establishment of 112,000, slightly lower than in 1991. In 2004 this number will decline to

45,000. Extended-service volunteers (now fewer than 100) will increase, while professional officers will decline, which will create serious social dislocation (as will the release of 23,000 civilians). In 2000 alone some 5,150 officers will be discharged. (The officer pyramid now consists of roughly 3,300 lieutenants and senior lieutenants; 3,570 captains, 3,560 majors, 3,010 lieutenant colonels, and 2,400 colonels, and 53 generals.) Because of demographic trends, the number of conscripts will decline as the overall force shrinks; the 42,000 conscripts in 1999 will fall to 25,000 by 2004.

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Bulgaria is a late starter on reform. Most documents have been developed in the last two years—a "National Security Concept" in Spring 1998, and "Military Doctrine" in June 1999. Bulgaria used the U.S. Defense Reform (Kievenaar) Study in preparing its Military Doctrine and Plan 2004, which was adopted in October 1999 and determines the organizational development of the armed forces and Membership Action Plan (MAP).

Unlike Hungary and the Czech Republic, Bulgaria enjoys popular support for the military and spends more—roughly 2.1 percent of GDP in 1998—on defense. Like Hungary and the Czech Republic, Bulgaria aims to join NATO and the European Union (EU). To achieve this, Bulgarian defense planning includes information planning, developing immediate and rapid reaction forces, and international force contributions (e.g., Multinational Peacekeeping Force South Eastern Europe [MPFSEE], headquartered at Plovdiv). Bulgaria also plans to develop a Law on Crisis Management, which will draw on Kosovo experience, especially relations with NATO and neighbors.

Bulgaria's Plan 2004 is well-conceived, but did not receive parliamentary support; the "Military Doctrine" (which assumes no threat)

was approved by parliament as a law. Consequently, problems might result when guaranteed resources come due. (A currency board and a stabilized economy improve prospects for success.) Also, because the general staff—not the parliament or local communities—decided which bases to close, political opposition and pressure might alter the plan as implemented.

Romania had a defense establishment of 150,000 in 1999, about 55 percent of the 1990 total. In 1998 alone, 11,000 officers and NCOs left the forces, of whom 85 percent were majors, lieutenant colonels, and colonels who did not leave happily; 75 percent were over 40 years of age. Though Romanian armed forces already have substantially downsized, more reductions are to come. Personnel development policy needs to be based upon merit and competition and structured both to correct a reverse officer pyramid and to achieve balance among the officer and NCO corps. Service as an NCO also must be made more attractive.

Romania approved a "National Security Strategy" and a "Military-Defense Doctrine" in 1994. Since 1998 these documents have been rewritten, but not yet approved. Romanian armed forces need an approved national strategy from which to derive defense strategy, military doctrine, and strategic directives. Nevertheless, with the assistance of the United Kingdom and United States (Kievenaar Study), a "National Defense Framework Action Plan" (FAP) for 2000–2005 and a "Long Term Framework" to 2010 have been established with the objective of joining NATO by 2005 and the EU by 2010. The plan identified three military options varying from 87,000, to 112,000, to 140,000. (According to the army reform, by 2004 the overall defense establishment will decline to 140,000.) The 112,000 military variant was a political decision taken because of Romania's financial limitations.

Phase one of the FAP (2000–2003) is to restructure the forces to achieve minimal operational capability; that is to provide credible defense and NATO interoperability. Phase two (2004–2007) expects to witness equipment modernization and achievement of operational capability. Romania's conscript cohort of 135,000 is more than adequate to meet its

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Comparative Trends in Defense Establishments and Budgets

	Strength of Defense Establishments			Defense Budget as Percentage of GDP			Conscription Term (Months)
	Past	Current	Projected	Past	Current	Projected	
Czech Republic	1993	1999	2004	1993	1999	2000	12
Total	131,965	78,580	60,000	2.6%	1.9%	2%	
Military	106,679	56,935	47,200				
Civilian	25,286	21,630	12,800				
Hungary	1989	1999	2001	1997	1999	2000	9*
Total	155,700	60,000	45,000	1.4%	1.6%	1.51%	
Military	122,400	52,200	37,000				
Civilian	33,300	7,800	8,000				
Poland	1988	1999	2003	1994	1998	2000	12
Total	± 400,000	285,000	150-180,000	2.4%	2.26%	2.08%	
Military		205,000					
Civilian		80,000					
Bulgaria	1991	1999	2004	1996	1998	2000	12**
Total	117,000	112,000	45,000	2.6%	2.1%	2.3%	
Military		82,000	40,000				
Civilian		30,000	5,000				
Romania	1990	1999	2003		2000	2007	12
Total	320,000	180,000	140,000	NA	1.8%	2.1%	
Military	275,000	150,000	87-112,000				
Civilian	5,000	30,000	28,000				
Slovak Republic	1995	1999	2002	1995	1999		12**
Total	47,000	35,000	25-30,000	2.6%	1.7%	NA	
Lithuania		1999	2008	1995	1999	2002/2005	12
Total	NA	12,200	23,000	0.5%	1.51%	2%/2.5%	
Slovenia		1999			1999	2010	7
Total	NA	8,200-to-9,400	NA	NA	1.55%	2.1%	

* possible reduction to 6

** possible reduction to 9 or 6

12-month requirements, which were 67,000 in 1998 and will be reduced to 25,000 after 2000.

The officer corps pyramid is malformed and needs to be streamlined. Hence, before 2003 the current 30,000-strong Romanian officer corps must be halved. For example, its 2,300 colonels must be reduced to 630; the 5,618 lieutenant colonels to 1,800; the 7,800 majors to 2,200; and the 9,908 captains to 4,050. At the same time lieutenants should be increased from 3,051 to 3,750, and second lieutenants from 2,218 to 2,400. Also generals will increase from the current 101 to 120. Restructuring this unbalanced officer corps will be a difficult and painful process.

In order to finance the transformation, the 2000 defense budget of \$710 million would constitute 1.8 percent of GDP, and is planned to steadily increase to 2.2 percent (\$1.2 billion) in 2007. Romania, in contrast to Bulgaria, will seek parliamentary approval for its plan. Despite a well-conceived plan, if the Romanian economy does not stabilize, a lower 87,000 variant might result, and further military

personnel reductions could aggravate civil-military tensions.

The **Slovak Republic** had a defense establishment of roughly 47,000 in January 1995, despite having been built from scratch after independence in January 1993. As of 1995, the force consisted of 13,900 professionals (10,100 officers, 3,400 warrant officers, and 400 NCOs) and 33,000 12-month conscripts. Slovakia's "Long-Term Defense Plan" projected the total force in the year 2000 to be 35,000, comprising 20,000 professionals (5,000 officers, 10,000 warrant officers, and 5,000 NCOs) and 15,000 conscripts.

The Army of the Slovak Republic (ASR) is the most respected institution in the country, enjoying more than 70 percent support, compared to 60 percent for the church and constitutional court. But perhaps for that very reason, ASR found itself in political and fiscal trouble. Former Prime Minister Vladimir Meciar increasingly exerted efforts to have his Movement

for a Democratic Slovakia (HZDS) party dominate ASR through politicization and budget manipulation from September 1994 to September 1998. Promotions were stalled after 1994. The Slovak Army had only 14 general officers because of Meciar's refusal to make new appointments, until President Michal Kovac finally appointed eight new generals in May 1997. Then without consulting the defense minister or chief of staff, in August 1998 acting President Ivan Gasparovic (HZDS) appointed eight new brigadier generals, promoted five officers to major general, and named a new Chief of Staff.

Fiscal constraints became extremely harsh. Inflation, coupled with defense reductions from 2.6 percent of GDP in 1995 to 1.7 percent in 1999, prevented replenishment of limited stocks inherited from Czechoslovakia after the 1993 split. Slovak forces also are plagued with social problems, including housing shortages that have delayed army restructuring and impeded retention of officers.

During 1997, the budget shortfall also had a negative impact on conscripts, professional officers, and training. The army command failed to call up 6,000 draftees (25 percent of the annual call-up) for lack of funds. Hence, the projected downsizing of ASR to 35,000 by the year 2000 became a reality in the fall of 1997. As a result the army had to develop a new concept entitled "An Integrated Program of Development in the Army and Slovak Arms Industry to the Year 2010, with a View to the Year 2015." The 1998 defense budget of Sk14.05 billion represented a 21 percent decrease from 1997 in real terms and had a dramatic negative impact on troop training and preparedness. Chief of Staff General Jozef Tuchyna candidly noted that, because the budget in 1988 was inadequate, he would be "compelled to reduce some tasks."

Defense reform, which has been energized since Mikulas Dzurinda took over from Meciar in 1998, faces a significant challenge to undo four years of damage. The new government in November 1998 overturned the August 1998 appointment of Marian Miklus and named General Milan Cerovsky as the new ASR Chief of Staff. Also the new government pursues NATO integration with greater vigor. In March 1999 it announced that it would send a 150-man engineering unit to SFOR, and significantly bolster its 35-man troop support for the United Nations on the Golan Heights. But since Slovakia's economy is now a problem, the

government has had to further reduce the 1999 defense budget (\$13.8 billion), which meant that toward the end of 1999 funds were not available to feed—let alone train—conscripts.

In spite of these problems, Slovakia wants to provide NATO with one rapid deployment battalion for peace support operations and eight MiG-29 aircraft. In addition, Slovak objectives are to reduce the armed forces to 25–30,000 by 2002, increase professionalization, reduce the number of recruits, and employ more civilians in defense. Conscription is to be reduced from 12 months to 9 by mid-2000, and eventually to 6 months. Finally, the general staff (in Trenčín) is to be fused with the defense ministry (in Bratislava) and both structures reduced. Not only will this be costly, it probably will produce civil-military friction.

There seems to be a disconnect between Slovak political goals and defense capabilities. The country needs an outside defense reform assessment to help the government rationalize its political objective to join NATO with the capabilities it would like to build and with its limited human and fiscal capacities.

Lithuania has planned for growth in armed forces from the January 1999 total of 12,200 (including 2,000 officers and NCOs) to 23,000, plus 15,000 in the National Volunteer Defense Force (NVDF) by 2008. Lithuania committed 1.51 percent of GDP in 1999 (724 million Litas or \$180 million), which is to increase to 2 percent in 2002 and 2.5 percent in 2005.

In contrast to the former non-Soviet Warsaw Pact (NSWP) partners, Lithuania was a republic in the former Soviet Union. It pursues a policy and doctrine of total defense, desires Euro-Atlantic integration, and—as a MAP partner—seeks NATO membership. The core of its ground forces is the 3,600-troop, six-battalion “Iron Wolf” motorized rifle brigade. There also are a Jaeger special forces battalion, engineering and staff battalions, an 850-man air force, and small navy. The NVDF—composed of 200 companies organized into battalions in 10 territorial defense formations—numbers around 10,000, with an additional 1,600 full-time officers.

As Lithuania builds its officer and NCO corps, it also plans to increase its 2,300 12-month conscripts in 1996 to 7,700 in 2001. The United Kingdom assisted in establishing a conscript training center that puts an end to Soviet-style practices and provides health care and English language training. Lithuania uses

conscription not only to build its reserve forces for total defense but also to build the citizens of a young democracy. Hence, conscripts will continue to constitute roughly 50 percent of the armed forces. Though Lithuania has benefitted from the U.S. Defense Reform (Kievenaar) Study concluded in Spring 1998, it remains

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concerned about the danger of force imbalances developing from its participation in the NATO Planning and Review Process (PARP), and hopes that the MAP feedback will be useful in preventing such distortions from occurring.

Slovenia is a small country of two million that was a former republic in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Like Lithuania, Slovenia aims to join NATO and the EU and is building up its armed forces, which range in strength from 8,200 to 9,400. Variations result from the number of conscripts (4,000 to 5,500), who serve for 7 months—a term that is too short for any meaningful activity aside from basic training for territorial defense. Constitutional prohibitions prevent the use of conscripts in peace support operations.

After the 1968 Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia, the defense ministry became responsible for territorial defense. Because this ministry performs many functions normally found in former NSWP interior ministries, its already low budget—1.55 percent of GDP in 1999, without pensions—is relatively even smaller. It should increase to 2.1 percent in 2010.

Slovenia may be overreaching in its attempts to join NATO. The stated goal of creating a 700-man Peace Support Battalion is

laudable, but seems to far exceed the physical capacities of a country with only 2 million people. In comparison, the three Baltic states, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, with a combined population almost four times that of Slovenia, are working with Denmark to construct the Baltic Battalion (BALTBAT)—which is *very* dependent upon external support. The goal of developing a battalion-strength unit diverts scarce resources from the objective of providing main defense forces. A better approach to providing peace support to the international community, might be to build on existing trilateral military cooperation with Italy and Hungary. This would allow Slovenia to acquire NATO interoperability and to participate in peace support operations in a way that is more compatible with its limited physical capacity. Slovenia (like Slovakia) needs U.S. assistance to conduct a defense reform assessment that will assist it to build armed forces that are more compatible with its physical limits and operational needs.

In conclusion, because restructuring the officer corps is likely to cause civil-military tensions, Washington might provide retraining programs for alternate careers and for developing NCO corps, and merit-based career development programs. Since the United States has all-volunteer forces, we need to enlist NATO allies, such as Germany, to provide partner programs that focus on using conscription to foster civic virtues (*Innere Führung* in the German experience), providing a recruitment pool for extended-service volunteers, and defining the length of time necessary to adequately train for specific military functions.

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